



Starting the Conversation: Advanced Care Planning

Advanced care planning allows you to make your health care wishes known and to assign someone you trust to make medical decisions for you if you are not able. An advanced directive is a tool to document your wishes.

Benefits of Advanced Care Planning

- Allows you to have a voice in your medical care when you cannot speak for yourself.
- Family members will not be burdened by being unsure of what you want medically.
- Distressed and emotional family members can avoid the conflict of decision making, and can be there to support you and one another.
- Discussing these important topics can bring people closer by improving understanding of your values and wishes.

Types of Advanced Directives

Living Will

This lets the medical team, your family and loved ones know what procedures or treatment you want provided to you and, under what circumstances or conditions.

Health Care Proxy/Health Care Agent

This is also known as a Medical Power of Attorney. This refers to an individual you designate to make medical decisions about your care, in the event you are unable to express your wishes. Select someone you trust. It may be a family member or close friend who understands your wishes. It is important to select someone you can trust to speak up for you and be clear about your wishes, even if others may be unhappy with your choices.



Understand the documents and your decisions

- Talk to your medical providers so you understand the specific medical actions that keep a person alive when their body can't function on its own. Topics to discuss include artificial resuscitation, the use of breathing tubes, artificial nutrition and hydration, and pain management.
- Reflect on your values and decisions. What kinds of treatments would you want? Under what conditions would you want these treatment measures? What are your values and views about what makes a life worth living? How do your beliefs and spiritual values contribute to your choices?

Complete Advance Directive Checklist

- Let your family and loved ones know who you have appointed as your healthcare agent and explain why.
- Once the Advance Directive is complete, make several copies; provide a copy to each of your medical providers and to those closest to you. Making sure your Healthcare Agent has a copy.
- Make sure that someone knows where to find your Advance Directive within your home.

Many websites offer additional information on advanced directives, including state specific forms. For more information or to obtain advanced directive forms, your medical providers or a VA social worker are excellent resources!